



HUEB

# PORTRAIT *without a face*

By Eugene King

IT WAS just twilight as she came out of the cathedral and stood for a moment on the north steps. She looked across 51st Street at the discreet gray building with the discreet sign: "Fernet Gallery of Modern Art"

A richly dressed couple was com-

ing out of the gallery, and the uniformed doorman opened a taxi door for them. When they drove away, and the doorman had pocketed his tip, the young woman moved down the cathedral steps.

It was safe now, she thought. The crowds would have thinned at this

Based on a radio script originally written for the CBS radio program Suspense.

By Louis Pelletier, Jr.

late hour.

She hurried across the street, and Georges, who had a roving eye for a pretty woman, watched her as she came straight toward him. He was ready to close the gallery, but held off as it became clear that she seemed to have business here.

He arranged his face in its may-I-assist-you expression, let his eyes run from her ankles to the colorful hat, and waited.

Her voice reminded him of the Angelus, and her accent proclaimed her a countrywoman.

"Good evening. The gallery is open for a few moments?"

Georges let his face express faint dismay. "I am sorry, Mademoiselle. I am closing at this instant."

"Oh!" She expressed a disappointment of great proportions. "I did so want to—would five dollars—?"

"I am so sorry," he said in French. "The closing time has passed by one half-hour, already."

"Ten dollars?"

"But no, Mademoiselle." Georges frowned on the whole system of bribery—regretfully, true, but he frowned.

"There is a picture which I must see," she explained with agitation. "I would be but a moment. I must see it. It is called—"

"I know," Georges said. "*Portrait Without A Face*. Fully half of New York saw it today, and the other half will see it tomorrow. If I may be excused now—"

"One moment, please. Have . . . have you seen the picture?"

"I?" Georges elevated amused eyebrows. "Should I waste time on such things? But I tell you this, it has people talking. It is the fad. A critic halted beside me this morning and—but wait, Mademoiselle. That man there, coming down from Madison Avenue. He might allow you in to see the *Portrait*. He is the artist, Paul Degelle."

The girl's eyes followed his pointing finger, and her face took on quick dismay.

"No," she said. "*Merci*, no. I—"

She turned away, almost running down the steps. "Taxi!" she called, and got into one that swerved to the curb.

Georges shrugged, watching the taxi pull out into traffic. You get some funny ones, he reflected. Pretty, too.

When the tall, dark, neatly-dressed young man Georges had named Paul Degelle came up the steps, Georges addressed him with a mixture of respect and friendliness. This Degelle was a *type*, all right. He was polite at all times, and the fire behind his dark eyes was discomfiting. This young artist was of a stature.

"Evening," Degelle said, in French.

"Good evening, Monsieur."

Degelle turned and brooded on traffic. "The exhibition is driving people away? She seemed in a great hurry."

"That one? She was trying to get in. She tried to bribe me."

Degelle whirled. His eyes were darkly intense.

"Bribe?" he asked sharply.

"Truly, Monsieur Degelle. She increased her offer from five to ten dollars." He stared at Degelle.

The young artist was almost quivering with excitement. "Did she—was the *Portrait*—?"

"That's all she wanted to see. She must have become familiar with your work in France. Her accent was straight off Boul' Mich'."

Degelle's eyes were backlit with sharp emotion. "Is M. Fernet in?"

"In his office, M. Degelle."

Degelle's long legs ate up the corridor at a half run. He ignored the custom of knocking and burst into the office of the graying proprietor of the gallery.

Fernet's huge nose pointed querulously at Degelle. "My dear Paul," he said mildly.

Degelle leaned over the desk. "She came! She was here but this moment, and fled at my approach. She will return!"

"She?" Fernet asked with a tranquillity that was reflected by his generous stomach. "Be calm, my boy. Who was here?"

"The woman in the *Portrait*, imbecile. Who else?"

"And did you recognize her?" Fernet inquired lazily.

"I did not. I saw her at a distance only. But she will come back, as I intended. She did not see it today."

"Then you will kill her?"

Degelle stood erect, his excitement replaced by quiet determination.

"Then I shall kill the murderer of my father."

He stared beyond the walls of the room. "With every brush stroke I made on that canvas, I knew I was bringing her into my hands. I knew she would have to see the painting. She must learn how much I know. She will be back. I feel it."

SHE used her key to enter the apartment. It wasn't that she hated to disturb the man who was inside; it mattered nothing to her if he was disturbed. It was a spirit of independence that motivated her.

She hung her coat in the hall closet and entered the living room. A short blond man with gray eyes raised himself to a sitting position on the divan, set his drink on a low table, and glared at her.

"Colette, where have you been?" he demanded harshly.

"For a walk, Charles," she said wearily. "Along Fifth Avenue. I needed a breath of fresh air."

His full mouth made a sneer. "You are lying," he said violently. "You were at the Fernet Gallery."

She fell into a deep chair and pushed at her black hair with a limp hand. "All right, I am lying," she said. "I was at the Fernet Gallery."

He jumped to his feet and stood over her, hands clenched at his sides. "You fool!" he shouted. "I told you they'd kill you, once they were sure. You haven't the good sense to take advice. No! You've got to rush in and be shot, or strangled, or hit over the head, or however they will do it."

"Yes, Charles," she said without emotion. "You told me all that. I'm

going to bed."

He took her arm with strong hands. "Did you see the picture?"

Still she didn't look at him. Not that she seemed to be trying to avoid his burning glance; she seemed simply not to care.

"I'm going to bed, Charles."

He shook her. "Did you see the picture?"

"No."

"That's good. The gallery was closed?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

He took his hands away, and an expression of affability spread over his face. "Eh—drink?"

"No, thank you, Charles."

She went to the bedroom door and opened it.

"A moment, Colette," he called.

She stopped, not turning.

"Here is something I'd like you to read before you go to bed, Colette."

The girl sighed, turned back into the room. She came toward him as he picked up a newspaper clipping from the low table. She took it from him, glanced at it, shuddered, and handed it back.

"I don't wish to read it, Charles. Good night."

"Wait!" he barked. "You will hear this, then, Colette. It is to your—our—interest. Since you won't have a drink, do you mind if I—?"

She sank back into the deep chair, her hands hanging limply over the arms. "I haven't minded what you do since the second week of our mar-

riage, Charles."

He poured himself a drink, held the clipping under the lamp. "Listen. This is a review of the exhibition."

He cleared his throat, sipped at his drink, and began: "This Portrait Without a Face is no ordinary painting. This is the portrait of a crime, a portrait painted by a man who must have been there when it happened. Thusly: the artist is resting in a darkened room into which filter the noises of a party upstairs in the big house. Remember, Colette?"

"The reception for General Degelle, Paris, nineteen-thirty-nine," she said bitterly. "Go on."

"The woman's back is towards the artist. He does not see her face. At her feet is a hand outstretched. The hand belongs to—surely you know, Colette."

"Charles," she burst out, "quit sneering at me. Of course I know. It is the hand of General Degelle."

"Correct, my dear. To proceed: 'All this happens in an instant. The scene is photographed on the brain of the artist. A woman in evening dress . . . her back towards the artist . . . in a doorway . . . a dead man at her feet. That is 'Portrait Without a Face.'"

Charles put the clipping down, smiling gently, picked up his drink and tossed it off. "Rather a graphic review, eh?"

Colette clenched her hands. "Charles, stop torturing me."

He dropped his condescension, his taunting. He now spoke quietly and

gravely.

"Colette, it is our lives or his. Paul Degelle will have to be put out of the way. Simple self-protection is our motive. He knows who you are, and he has painted this picture to lure you to him. He will kill you without compunction, despite his love for you. When you killed the general, you not only killed Paul's father, you betrayed France. He must kill you, for he is a sloppy sentimentalist. Ah, well."

His voice took on a musing tone. "It is regrettable, perhaps, that such a promising artist must be eliminated. Perhaps not. He is not so much an artist as he is a draftsman."

"That isn't true!" she said fiercely.

"Ah, how brightly still burns the flame of love," Charles drawled. "It has blinded critics before this. I say he is a draftsman. Really good art cannot be criticized in words, but his paintings can be so described. Art *per se* cannot be reduced to a verbal level, for it is compounded mainly of what the artist has in his subconscious. Even he cannot put this into words. He can only say 'This is a painting', or 'This is a geometrical arrangement of certain forms.'"

"Spare me," Colette murmured.

"You are right, my dear," Charles agreed. "Colette, you must kill him. This can be arranged. Tomorrow morning you will telephone Paul Degelle at his apartment. You will say you have seen the publicity on his exhibition. You have wondered what became of him. You will say—and your voice will tremble—that you

wish to see him. And he will gather that, after all these years, you still love him, you understand, Colette?"

Her answer was a whisper. "I understand."

"For," he went on in the voice of one reasoning with a moron, "the choice is simple. Either he kills you, or you kill him. You must kill him, for I will not have our work interrupted."

"Your work, Charles."

"But no, my dear. It is yours also, by necessity. For who, I ask, killed General Degelle?"

She called Degelle on the following morning, and heard his stunned whisper:

"Colette! Oh, God, where are you? Where are you?"

"Paul," she said, and her voice trembled of its own accord. "I would like to see you."

"Anywhere," he said. "Any time. The South Pole? Afghanistan? Maison Henri?"

She laughed softly. "Maison Henri, Paul. In an hour? At twelve?"

"At twelve, darling," he said.

She hung up and turned to face Charles, smiling faintly, his gray eyes mocking. "Excellent, my dear. Your voice had just the proper tremolo."

He became stern. "See that it does not affect your actions. It is your life or his. You know that."

She said nothing, and didn't meet his mocking eyes.

"Stand up, let me look at you," he commanded.

She did so, and turned so that he



could appraise the general effect of her dark blue frock, her slim legs, the blue hat with its polka-dotted veil, the white bag, the blue-and-white pumps. She kept her face turned away, and two tears slid down her cheeks.

"Excellent," he said. "That costume will rouse the man in him." He paused, then yanked her roughly around. He stared at her face, little mocking lights in his eyes. "Why, Colette! My dear! You're crying. How touching, the lovers parted, the lovers united. April in April! Chestnuts in blossom!"

"Charles!" she cried. "Please . . ."

She ran from the apartment, went out to find a taxi, and repaired her make-up enroute.

She took a table discreetly apart from others, ordered a glass of wine and sipped it while she reviewed the past in her mind.

What would he be like? Would he still have that lopsided grin that reminded you of a friendly puppy? Would his dark hair swirl in impossible patterns? Would his eyes blaze with enthusiasm, his words pour out when inspiration seized him? Would his hands be tender still, his lips—she shook off her thoughts. Danger lay along such lines. She must steel herself for the ordeal ahead. She had a job to do.

He came presently, with his lopsided grin, his dark hair aswirl, his eyes soft with memory.

They shook hands.

"Colette!"

"It's good to see you, Paul."

They stood without speaking for a long moment before they laughed softly and sat down.

"You are lovelier than—" He searched for a word, shrugged. "There is no comparison."

"You are gallant as—as ever, Paul!"

A waiter materialized in the fashion of waiters. "Will Monsieur order now?"

"No," Paul said absently, "not just yet. Oh—bring us two sherries."

The waiter dematerialized.

"Tell me about yourself," Paul said.

"What can I say, Paul?"

"Let me look at you, then. I should like to paint you this way. The light is just right. I should call it *Return*."

"To what, Paul?"

His face became serious. "To what once was, darling. I shall never let you go again, *ma chérie*."

"But my dear, one can't pick up the broken past and stick it together again. That past is gone. You've changed, I've changed."

He looked at her with the motions of a professional artist, measuring with spread fingers, making a frame with his hands. "A new deepness about the eyes, perhaps. You've been unhappy, Colette. It shows through."

She looked down at her hands, one in a glove, the other toying with a fork. "Yes," she murmured.

"I wrote to you almost every day for a year," he said.

"I couldn't answer, Paul."

"Darling, you can answer this.

*Why* did you run away?"

The waiter brought two glasses of nut-brown brightness, set them on the table with reverence, smiled tenderly at them, and went away.

She picked up her wine glass, looked into it, set it down. She raised her eyes to his.

"You musn't ask, Paul," she blurted.

"Was there——"

"Someone else?" She didn't smile. "No, Paul. No one ever to fill your place."

"When you didn't write," he said, "I thought——"

"You were perfectly right," she broke in, "to think anything of me, darling."

"I thought," he went on, "of Charles Gaveau. He was so insane about you, and he hated me so much."

She made a gesture of distress. "Please, let's don't talk about Charles."

They were wordless for a few moments. She turned her eyes from his and surveyed the large dining room in which waiters cat-footed from table to table, and the silence was gently broken by soft clashings of cutlery and glassware.

"I thought," he went on finally, "if she ever marries Charles Gaveau——"

He broke off, smiled his lopsided smile. "I'm sorry. Seven years out of your life. There's so much I don't know."

"I know everything about you, Paul."

He shrugged. "Press notices."

"I followed everything you did," she went on. "The prison camp . . . I remember that. When you escaped to this country. Your first exhibit here. I have all the clippings. I was so happy for you, Paul, so glad they believed in you over here, just as I did."

His smile now was pure pleasure. He sipped the sherry, rolled it over his tongue, made a slight mouth of distaste. "Sweet," he commented. "Yes, they have treated me well in this country. Better than I deserve."

"No, Paul. Not better. Only your just due. I've read the reviews of the exhibit at the—what is the gallery?"

"Fernet."

"Yes. The reviews—well, you know what they say."

"They seem to like it."

She leaned towards him across the table. "Paul, I must see that exhibit."

He raised his generous eyebrows. "But of course, darling. Any time. Now, if you like."

"No, not now, Paul. I want to see it alone—with you, of course—to-night."

Silence hung between them while he frowned. The waiter materialized again, glanced at the frown, duplicated it.

"The sherry is sweet, Monsieur?"

"The sherry is sweet, yes," Paul said. "But never mind. Bring us the regular lunch, the entree to be selected by you."

The waiter glowed. His expression said that at last those long years of apprenticeship, those long periods of carrying dirty dishes away, had been

rewarded. He turned an incandescent smile on Colette.

"Perhaps madame—" He looked closer, his smile widened. "*Pardon!* Mademoiselle. Perhaps Mademoiselle would like the squab *en casserolle*?"

"Anything," Colette said abstractedly.

"*Et Monsieur?*"

"*Vite!*" Paul snapped.

The waiter effaced himself.

Paul and Colette looked at each other, but the mood was broken. The fragments of something lay between them, something lost, something that could not, like Humpty Dumpty, be put together again.

"I made the suggestion, Paul," she said formally, "because I wished an opportunity to look at your newest work without distraction from sight-seers. I realize it would be an imposition—"

"Colette!" he chided. "I shall show it to you. At ten?"

"At ten, Paul." The mood was mended. "Thank you, darling."

CHARLES was sullen and a little drunk when she returned to the apartment. His gray eyes were slightly glazed, but his tongue was as sharp as ever.

"You have been an unconscionable time coming, my dear. I trust you enjoyed yourself."

Colette took off her hat carefully, placed it in its box and returned the box to the closet. "I went to a movie, Charles."

He lay back on the couch, placed the drink on his chest. "What you

need to do above all else is to go to movies at this time. Movies!"

Colette took off her shoes and sat in the deep chair. "It was a Mickey Mouse. Very funny. There was an ice man—"

"Spare me!" he snarled. "Did you arrange everything?"

"Yes, Charles," she said with a sneer. "The execution is set for ten o'clock. Please omit flowers."

"I shall, my dear. At ten? We have time barely to eat and to get you dressed. Perhaps you'd better dress now, and go directly from the restaurant. What are you wearing? What purse will you take?"

"My black purse, Charles. Why?"

He got up, went to the dresser. "It's in here?"

He opened drawers, took out the suede bag, eyed it. "It is the right size. It is a good choice."

He rummaged in another drawer, found an automatic pistol and a handful of shells. He went back to the divan, loaded the gun and snapped a shell into the firing chamber. He glanced up at Colette, who was watching the procedure with wide eyes.

"Don't look so shocked, my dear," he chided. "Surely you've seen a pistol loaded before. I must make sure this will go off when the trigger is pulled."

He eyed her keenly, noting her white face, her trembling hands. "Perhaps I'd better drop in on you and Degelle after all. I am not certain that you will be able to go through with this."

Colette leaned back. She forced her hands to relax. She smiled lazily. "Don't worry. I have my schedule well in mind. I shall do what I have made up my mind to do."

"Good!" he said heartily. "Shall we get at it, then? Shall I draw your bath?"

"Never mind," she said almost gaily. "I'll draw it."

They went to a good restaurant, and had champagne at Colette's insistence.

"A celebration," she said, and laughed musically.

Charles fell in with her, and gave the waiter an elaborate dinner order. "You are right," he said to Colette. "We are celebrating. We are—yes, there is no better word. Good cheer, death to the blockheads!"

At the end of the dinner, Charles doubled his usual percentage tip, waved gay farewell to the waiter, and escorted Colette to a cab.

"Remember," he said under his breath. "The pistol is on top. Be careful when you pay the cab fare. But why should you need to be careful? I shall pay the fare. After all, it is a celebration!"

He shoved a bill at the taxi driver, gave the address, and she was off. She did not look back.

Paul was waiting for her at the door of the Fernet Gallery. He took her hands.

"My dear," he said softly. He unlocked the gallery door, took her inside, switched on lights.

They began the rounds of the pictures. "This," he said, before a

painting of a sloop. "*L'Hirondelle*."

Colette chuckled. "She made me seasick once. Remember how you held my head?"

"Can I forget?" he asked softly.

They went from painting to painting, each a slice out of their lives together. It was not necessary that they speak. They communicated emotions by pressures of the hands, side-wise glances, secret smiles. Colette's eyes were glistening when they finished the first room.

"And now," Paul said, "you wish to see the *Portrait Without A Face*?"

"Yes, Paul."

"It is in the next room. Wait until I turn out the lights. I want you to see it under my own conditions. Here, let me take your coat. It is getting warm."

He helped her off with her coat. He turned out the lights, felt his way towards her, and guided her into the next room. He moved cautiously in the pitch black, feeling his way with each step until he bumped into a bench.

"Here," he said, "sit here. I'll turn on the lights."

He crossed the big room until he found the switch, but he did not push it.

"Colette," he called softly.

"Yes, Paul?"

"Colette, there is something I must tell you. I have put something of you into each painting I have done. It is not surprising, is it? For you shared all these scenes with me. Did you notice the graceful curves of the boats? Those curves were

formed in my thoughts of you. The soft colors of the sea, and sky, and flowers? Those were born in my thinking of those wonderful days with you. And the *Portrait*—you know its genesis?"

"Somewhat, Paul," came the soft reply in the dark.

"You remember my father, Colette? That gentle, stern, bitter, kindly old man. I loved him, and he loved France. And some deluded woman killed him, Colette. She thought his work for the ministry of air was wasted effort. She shot him. Perhaps she thought she was doing the best thing. I don't know. I only know that I shall kill the murderer of my father, and I have painted this picture as a trap for the murderer. Look!"

He snapped on the lights, and the *Portrait* was illumined in harsh brilliance. Colette caught her breath but said nothing.

"Charles Gaveau and his newspapers," Paul continued, "crucified my father. 'Maginot Line!' they cried. Ha! But look, Colette. Notice the lines on that figure. The flow of them. Could those have been painted strictly from memory? No, my dear, they came out of the heart. Because, Colette, that woman is you."

Colette said nothing.

"The light on your hair, Colette. How would I have known, had I not seen it a hundred times? The form. I know it well, darling. And I also know you came here to kill me to-night."

She turned on the bench and faced

him, clutching her purse. "No, Paul. I swear."

His smile was sardonic. "Never mind. I know. Charles Gaveau talked you into it." He waved away her attempted interruption. "I knew you married him, Colette."

She half rose and his voice was like the gavel of a judge:

"Sit down!"

She sat down.

She said: "You lied to me at lunch, then?"

"*Certainement*. I wanted you here tonight. I knew you would not come if you knew I was aware of that marriage. Do you remember when I warned you away from him?"

"Yes." She had turned her back to the *Portrait*. "He told me today it was your life or mine."

"He's very clever, that Charles. He used his cleverness in nineteen-thirty-nine. He made you believe it was your duty to kill General Degelle."

"I did believe," she muttered. "Up to the last minute. Then I knew I couldn't kill that good old man. I couldn't. I didn't!"

"You're lying, Colette."

"No, Paul." She turned toward him, entreaty in her eyes. "No, Paul. I didn't. So help me, all the gods I know."

"You're lying," he said contemptuously.

"No! No, Paul! Listen to me!" She waved a hand at the painting. "I will tell you about it. I stood there looking at him, the pistol in my hand. He started walking toward me.

He said: 'Give me the gun, Colette. You are mad to kill me. I mean so much to France.' I felt dizzy, Paul. I wanted to run. I raised the pistol. . . . There were two shots. He fell at my feet. I dropped the gun. . . ."

"Then you opened the library door to escape."

"Yes," she said. "I ran out on the terrace and through the garden. I ran blindly and fell. A strong pair of arms lifted me. Charles."

"You told him you'd killed my father."

"And I begged him to take me away. He promised to get me out of France. He said I had done a great service for my country."

"A great service!"

She looked at him with wide dark eyes. "Paul," she pleaded, "Will you believe I did not want to kill General Degelle? Will you?"

Paul Degelle took a gun from his pocket. He hefted it in his hand, and spoke softly. "It all works out according to plan, Colette. Ever since that day, I have searched for you."

He was silent for a moment. "I painted things. You saw them. Those are paintings in the other room. This—the *Portrait* is a piece of draftsmanship. I carried it in my head all these years. I put it on canvas when I heard that you were here. I knew that the critics would hail it as great. It is a piece of trivia. Critics! What do they know of art? But I knew that once you heard of it you would be surely drawn here to see it, to find out how much I knew. You can see. Look at it. It is you, Colette. I knew

it that night. I recognized you. And now the debt will be paid."

She jumped to her feet. Her voice took on overtones of hysteria. "Paul, you must believe me!"

"Sit down!" The words were like clubs, beating her back on to the bench.

"Paul, listen! I didn't want to kill him, I didn't want to go away with Charles. But I was in too deep, too . . . deep . . ."

She began to cry, noisily and convulsively. He watched her with an impassive face, without movement. His dark eyes held no expression. Presently she stifled her sobs, raised her tear-streaked face.

The hysterical note was now gone from her voice. It was low and urgent. "Paul, I have always loved you. I love you now."

"After your coming here to kill me?" he inquired bitterly.

"No!" she cried. "I wouldn't have. I knew. . . . I *knew* I couldn't go through with it."

He said in a flat, level voice: "It's too late, Colette!" He raised the gun he held in his hand. "Look at the picture, Colette. I want you to see it clearly. Notice my father's blood, almost touching your slipper. See that hand, limp in a death he didn't deserve."

"Please, Paul," she moaned.

"Look at it!" he rasped.

She obeyed his command to face the painting, but she didn't look at it. Tears streamed from her eyes, and her small body shook with harsh, hacking sobs.



# PORTRAIT WITHOUT A FACE

Degelle, standing with gun upraised, made a sudden light, backward leap into the shadow of a pillar.

A man came through the door from the next room. It was Charles Gaveau. He aimed a heavy, ugly pistol.

"For you, Degelle," he growled, and fired.

Paul Degelle fired deliberately. The first shot spun Gaveau around, and Colette screamed. The second shot caught Charles squarely between the shoulders, and he pitched forward on his face. He kicked once and lay still.

Colette was standing, hands over her mouth, eyes wide with questions and terror.

Paul said quietly: "And so I have killed the murderer of my father.

France is revenged."

"Charles?" she said.

"Charles. I examined the gun you dropped that night. It had not been fired. The shots came from the terrace. Charles was never sure you would go through with it. I knew he wouldn't be sure of you tonight. You were the bait, my dear. I left the door open downstairs so that he could come in quietly. He was here to kill again, if you failed."

"But—" She passed a hand over her eyes. "He told me—I thought —"

"That you had killed my father? You were intended to think it. Come here."

She went to him. He put his arms around her. They stood that way for a long time, saying nothing.



# CASE HISTORY

*Earlier in these pages you have read how SUSPENSE, the Mystery Magazine, came into being. Now we would like to tell you how SUSPENSE, the radio program, first appeared on the air.*

*During the Summer of 1940, the Columbia Broadcasting System offered the listening audience a series called "Forecasts", which were tryouts of new program ideas created by CBS. Forecast number four was SUSPENSE. It was presented on July 22, 1940, starring Herbert Marshall and Edmund Gwenn. "Variety", the bible of Show business, reviewed SUSPENSE in its radio columns. We reprint that review here.*

What Columbia offers for sale in this one is the "Suspense Technique" of the English film director, Alfred Hitchcock. This series is called SUSPENSE.

As a sample of how he does it, and what he might do regularly, if the price were right, the selection was a "Jack the Ripper" thriller, "The Lodger" by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, adapted by Joan Morrison.

It belonged to the "My-God-I-Can't-Stand-Anymore" school of dramatic intensity. One goose pimple says to another: "This is what I was telling you about!"

Hitchcock is a director with an exceptionally acute ear. He achieves his results by a Ravel-like rhythmic pummeling of the nervous system. Music, sound effects, the various equivalents of squealing shoes, deep breathing disembodied voices are mingled in the telling with a mounting accumulation of small descriptive touches that pyramid in tension.

As heard Monday night at 9:30 the narrative was taut and gripping. It was marked by the master touch of the tempo king of Elstree. Steady, inexorable, quickening, the piece was professionally a horror zombie that made a strong case for having Hitchcock on the air this fall . . . Herbert Marshall doubled as the narrator and the black-cloaked religious fanatic who took lodgings and only emerged by fog-light to prowl the streets looking for girls who were pretty, blonde, and tipsy. These he liquidated with a long knife and the next morning the headlines screamed of a new horror in London.

Marshall gave a vivid and versatile reading with inevitable recollections of Charles Laughton and Orson Welles. Good too was Edmund Gwenn in the role of the husband . . . and credit the actress who carried most of the burden as the frightened landlady, Mrs. Bunting. She was Noreen Gammil and very good.

All in all this SUSPENSE had a mule-like kick and demonstrated, which is hardly surprising, that the Hitchcock of the cinema has much to sell the electrified air.

... *Variety*, July 24, 1940